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Statement submitted by Women Deliver, Inc., a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Girls and women are central to sustainable development in all domains — and investments in girls and women power progress for all. Still, they remain disproportionately impacted by systems, services, and infrastructure that fail to recognize and respond to their diverse needs and realities.

As the sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women begins its work, it is critical that governments acknowledge all of the factors that drive inequities in girls' and women's access to social protection systems, public services, and sustainable infrastructure, and commit to rebuilding systems to reflect the lived realities of girls and women. This means not only focusing on high-profile, widely-accepted solutions, but also committing to action on deeply entrenched norms, behaviours, and structures that continue to drive inequalities and imbalances.

Social protection systems, access to public services, and sustainable infrastructure are key to ensuring that we Leave No One Behind on the road to 2030. In its World Social Protection report in 2015, the International Labour Organization (ILO) found a strong correlation between a country's social protection expenditure as a percentage of GDP and the percent of its population that is able to rise above poverty levels. However, this same report finds that almost three quarters of the world's population lacks access to such schemes. Women are more likely than men to live in poverty; the recent UN-Women Report "Turning Promises to Action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" cites that 330 million women and girls live on less than US$1.90, compared to 325 million men and boys. Youth also disproportionately bear the burden of poverty; according to UNFPA, more than 500 million youth globally live in poverty, many lacking access to even basic services. As extreme poverty disproportionately affects youth and women, the absence of — or the inaccessibility — to social safety nets and public services hits them hardest.

States must commit to addressing systemic imbalances that hold girls and women back from reaching their full potential, thereby constraining progress for all.

Unpaid care is one example. According to a 2018 ILO report, women perform 76.2 percent of the total amount of unpaid care work, 3.2 times more time than men. These data reflect the entrenched beliefs that women are caregivers, and their roles and value to society are primarily in the home. Data from 64 countries show that 16.4 billion hours are spent in unpaid care work every day — equivalent to 2.0 billion people working 8 hours per day with no remuneration. If these services were valued on the basis of an hourly minimum wage, they would amount to 9 percent of global GDP, or US$11 trillion.

These statistics show the huge time and financial cost of girls' and women's unpaid care work. As a result, women have less time to engage in paid labour, or they must work longer hours, combining paid and unpaid labour to support their families. Girls' and women's unpaid work subsidizes the cost of care that helps sustain families, and often fills in for limited or lacking social services — particularly child or elder care. Child care and elder care responsibilities are two big drivers of the global wage gap, which becomes pronounced between ages 25 to 34. Unpaid care constricts women's ability to participate in formal sector employment and can limit them from receiving social protections or services that are tied to paid labour. This is starkly demonstrated in the global pension gap. UN-Women's Progress of the World's Women 2015–2016 Report finds that in most countries round the world women are less likely to receive a pension than are men, and when they do they receive fewer benefits, resulting in a gender pension gap that the World Economic Forum estimates at 30 to 40 percent. Women tend to live longer than men do, and to have higher health

costs as they age, rendering this gap all the more precarious. These disparities disenfranchise women economically and serve to reinforce power imbalances tied to dependence on benefits attached to men's work outside of the home.

Acknowledging and addressing the disproportionate burden of unpaid care not only benefits girls and women but also entire societies. In 2017, the United Nations Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment reported that investments in the care sector equivalent to just 2 per cent of a country's GDP could increase employment rates by 4 to 7 percentage points, with women filling the majority of these newly-created jobs.

In order to power progress for all, states must examine their other social protection policies and regulations that constrain girls and women from full participation in society and full enjoyment of their human rights. For example, the 2018 Women, Business, and the Law report found that 104 countries have at least one law impeding women's economic engagement. The same report found that 59 countries globally do not have laws protecting women from sexual harassment in the workplace. These barriers to economic equality are exacerbated by poor social services and infrastructure, such as limited or insecure access, control, or ownership of vital assets, such as land, housing, financial services, capital, agricultural inputs, and transportation.

These examples have real implications for the theme of this year's Commission on the Status of Women, and point us in the direction of change. In order to achieve gender equality, and provide to girls and women the services that they need and deserve, we must fundamentally rework the structure and design of social protection systems, public services, and sustainable infrastructure to be inclusive — in the fullest sense of the word. At Women Deliver, we know that we cannot achieve this by focusing on the few most visible areas that touch women's lives. For real and lasting progress, we need to recognize and address all of them — especially those that are the hardest to acknowledge and hardest to change.

This means addressing labour market inefficiencies driven by women's unequal burden of unpaid care work, and committing to gender-responsive social protection systems that recognize and respond to the unequal burden of unpaid care and the intrinsic economic cost of this work.

It means recognizing the burden of unpaid care by including measures in national statistics, which can illustrate the extent to which different groups contribute to unpaid labour. It means remunerating and reducing the unpaid care burden by providing universal access to affordable child and elder care, and by investing in other sustainable infrastructure that adequately responds to energy and water, sanitation, and hygiene needs. It means redistributing this burden by redoubling efforts to promote and support a gender balance in parental leave policies, including incentive measures to encourage equality between maternal and paternity leave, and tackling social norms that stereotype women into undervalued or uncompensated work. It also means that states do more to support child care and elder care programs.

It means enabling partnerships; governments, donors, multilateral organizations, civil society, and the private sector, collectively have a role to play in removing barriers, challenging norms, and creating context-specific policies and interventions to guarantee gender-responsive social protection systems, access to public services, and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and genuine empowerment.

This may seem like a big task, but we have the resources and the know-how. What we need is the political will and the partnerships to move from rhetoric to action. We need more mechanisms for meaningful engagement with girls and women, more resources devoted to marginalized groups, and more sex and age disaggregated data

to inform the design of systems and infrastructure so that they are truly gender-responsive. This means including the voices of the girls and women in system, service, and infrastructure design and implementation, along with the voices of other sectors, including civil society, the private sector, and academia.

As states convene throughout this session of the Commission, we call on them to rise to this challenge and commit to concrete, time-bound, and tangible goals to reshape social protection systems, public services, and sustainable infrastructure to best recognize and respond to the needs and realities of girls and women. We look forward to action-oriented discussion and solutions for girls and women this week, and up to and beyond our Women Deliver Conference in Vancouver in June 2019. "Together, we can move beyond promises and rhetorical commitments and into action for girls and women, and for everyone."